

NEWARK
PUBLIC
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OFFICE



City Hall, 920 Broad Street, Room 214
Newark, New Jersey 07102
(201) 733-8004
Sharpe James, Mayor
Pamela E. Goldstein, Director

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
PLEASE CONTACT: Pam Goldstein (201) 733-6368

JAMES CALLS FOR STATE LEGISLATION TO CURB AUTO THEFT

Mayor Sharpe James today called on Newark's representatives in Trenton to enact legislation that would carry mandatory penalties for minors convicted of stealing cars.

James maintained, "A stolen car driven by a young person at speeds of 70, 80, 90 and 100 miles through city streets is as lethal a weapon as a gun. But unfortunately, the youth apprehended for stealing these vehicles, which can cost as much as \$100,000, often receive only a slap on the wrist, are charged with a misdemeanor and are back on the streets the same or next day."

The Mayor urged the state legislators to view auto theft as a major crime that threatens the safety of those involved, as well as the property and lives of innocent motorists and pedestrians.

James said, "We all know the impact of the Graves Bill, named for the late State Senator and Paterson Mayor Frank X. Graves, which carries a mandatory prison sentence for anyone found guilty of using a gun in the commission of a crime.

"We are facing a crisis in urban America," he maintained, in a letter to the state elected officials who represent New Jersey's largest city. "It is time that laws be enacted forcing those arrested for stealing cars or their parents or guardians to assume responsibility by paying the victims for the property damage, pain, injury and other costs they have suffered or requiring those found guilty of the crime to provide community service as restitution."

Community service, according to the Mayor, would include street cleaning, park maintenance or graffiti removal. And, if the crime is considered serious enough," he contended "the perpetrator should be placed in boot camp or tried as an adult and made to serve time in jail."

James maintained there would be an "overnight" decrease in auto theft with the enactment of these penalties.

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"Youngsters are stealing for recreation, and to add insult to injury, they know beforehand that nothing will happen to them if they are caught. This blatant disrespect for our laws tears at the very fiber of our nation and its cities.

"Your life, my life and the lives of others might be saved by your action," he told the legislators asking them to review his proposal in considering legislation to address his concerns.

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